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State Fire Marshal Says “Practice Safety in the Wake of this Storm: Don’t Make a Bad Situation Worse”

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, “There are many fire-related hazards during and after a winter storm like this one, such as using alternative heating and cooking devices incorrectly, damaged or down utility lines, water damaged appliances, use of candles for light, leaking gas lines, or improper use of generators, or using a gas oven for heat.”

To safeguard yourself, your family, and your home from these potential hazards, please follow these safety tips:

Smoke and Carbon Monoxide Alarms

Test your smoke alarms and carbon monoxide detectors. Many smoke alarms have a battery back up for just such emergencies, and all carbon monoxide alarms are required to have a battery back up. This might be a good time to put a fresh battery in your detectors, especially if the power is out.

Candle Safety

If the power is out, try to use flashlights and battery operated candles instead of traditional candles for light. Coan said, “We have had so many tragic fires from candles being used for light during power outages, including two college students last year.”

Heating Safety

Remember that most alternative heating sources are not designed to replace central heating appliances, so don’t over load them. Keep people and anything that can catch fire at least three feet away from heaters, woodstoves or fireplaces. Use a fireplace screen. Do not use an oven for heat; it can easily overload the oven. Gas ovens will quickly cause carbon monoxide poisoning. Coan said, “Don’t be tempted to use kerosene heaters, which are dangerous and illegal in Massachusetts.”

Cooking Safety

Use charcoal or LP-gas grills outdoors, at ground level, well away from the openings such as doors and windows. Never bring a gas or charcoal grill inside. It is unsafe and illegal to have LP-gas inside the home or on a balcony above the first floor. It is heavier than air and sinks.

Electrical Safety

If your home has sustained flood or water damage, and you can safely get to the main breaker or fuse box, turn off the power. This includes cable feeds. Look for and replace frayed or cracked extension cords, loose prongs, and plugs; exposed outlets and wiring could present a fire and life safety hazard. Appliances that emit smoke or sparks should be repaired or replaced. Be sure to have a licensed electrician check your home for any damage.

Gas Safety

Smell and listen for leaky gas connections. If you believe there is a gas leak, immediately leave the house and leave the door open. Never strike a match: any size flame can spark an explosion. Before turning the gas back on, have the gas system checked by a professional.

Generator Safety

Follow the manufacturer's instructions and guidelines when using a generator. Always use a generator or other fuel-powered machines outside of the home, away from doors and windows. Carbon monoxide fumes are odorless and can quickly overwhelm you indoors.

Outdoor Safety

Coan said, "Assume all wires on the ground are electrically charged. Keep pets and people well away from them and take a moment to explain to children just how deadly these wires are. Last year a cable repairman was electrocuted when he came in contact with a live electrical wire."

Coan said, "Be careful when dealing with downed trees; over exertion can lead to heart attacks, chain saw accidents are possible, and there may be live wires or other hazards you can't see right away."